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CHURCH / CARDINAL CUSHING

Cures everything

The aged church prince raved for a rather young woman: "My love for her and her love for me were the turning point in her life."

As Richard Cardinal Cushing, 73, Archbishop of Boston, described his "very close relationship" with Jacqueline Kennedy: "Before she met me, she was like a drowning man reaching for a straw."

The cardinal, who had once married John F. Kennedy to Jacqueline Lee Bouvier and consoled him after the death of the President, months before, the widow confessed her secret affinity for the Greek Aristotle Socrates Homer Onassis. Only five days before the wedding, she went to the Cardinal for two hours, accompanied only by a bodyguard. Cushing: "I encouraged you."

The outspoken shepherd's word shocked the faithful. Many American Catholics (72 percent of the 47 million US Catholics attend Mass each Sunday) saw Catholic Kennedy's new marriage as a sin. She violated, as the Vatican press secretary certified, "consciously the law of the Church" when she married the divorced Greeks.

The Cardinal received obscenity letters - currently 98 percent of the Archbishop's Ordinary's inbox - including "some in a gutter language" (Cushing). The chief shepherd decided: "I have had it" - that's enough for me. At the end of the year, when Pope Paul agrees, he wants to turn his back on his diocese and emigrate to South America as a missionary.

But Rome has been silent so far. The Vatican is already used to the idiosyncrasies of the US shepherd. For Richard Cardinal Cushing goes his own American way to God. He enlivened the church with his sense of show and business. After election campaigner style he collected souls and silver pieces for Rome.

He declared the index of books banned by the church to be "meaningless." "Canon law and moral theology are completely short for Cushing," mocked a Jesuit from "College to the Holy Cross."

The arguments of his faithful brothers at the Council in Rome, the prince of the Church from Boston could hardly follow: He speaks no Latin. In vain he offered the Pope a simultaneous translation facility.

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But Cushing captured the spirit of his admired Councilman John XXIII. In Protestant and Orthodox churches, in synagogues and before Masons, "Richard the Fighter for Brotherly Love" (as the lodge brothers called him) promoted mutual understanding.

In full regalia, he invited New York policemen to a pub for a beer. He led 500 nuns to a Red Sox baseball game and bought them Negro kisses - "the only kisses you'll ever get."

In a nursing home, His Eminence distributed "a little holy water": Seagram's whiskey in miniature bottles. "This will cure everything," he promised, "from hair loss to sore toenails." Two full-fledged retirees, he waved to the beat of an Irish jig - and he always waved the bell bag: In his 24 years as a bishop in Boston Cushing collected donations amounting to 1.4 billion marks.

He spent the collection as fast as he had taken it-not just churches, schools, and hospitals in his diocese. He donated, inter alia, an electric carillon for a church tower in Venice, gave 880 000 marks for a cathedral in Tanganyika and four million marks for the Fu-jen University on Formosa.

The Cardinal collected four million marks to redeem Cuba invaders who had failed by Castro In the Bay of Pigs. For one of his main tasks he considers the "fight against the atheist communist conspiracy".

Nevertheless, the cardinal named the liberal John F. Kennedy his "dearest friend." He considered himself the "spiritual father" of the Kennedy family and promised the president, before his death, "to look after Jacqueline and the children."

The millionaire clan honored the spiritual assistance. With 800,000 marks a year, the Kennedys are helping the shepherds repay the debts of their diocese.

But when the clan asked him to talk the presidential widow out of marriage to billionaire Onassis, the cardinal refused. After the wedding he reported to the dead friend: "Jack, I have fulfilled my promise."

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